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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001422

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STATE FOR EAP/BCLTV, DRL, INL, G/TIP, STATE PASS LABOR FOR
ILAB, COMMERCE FOR ITA JEAN KELLY, TREASURY FOR OASIA,
USPACOM FOR FPA, BANGKOK FOR USAID/RDM ASIA (FRIEDMAN)

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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [ELAB](#) [PGOV](#) [EAID](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: MAINLAND SE ASIA AND CHINA PLEDGE TIP COOPERATION

REF: A. RANGOON 1370

[B](#). RANGOON 1357

Classified By: COM CARMEN MARTINEZ for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: The Coordinated Mekong Ministerial Initiative against Trafficking (COMMIT) moved forward in Rangoon, October 27-29. All of the participating governments seemed to find a comfortable confluence of political, strategic, and operational elements in the MOU they signed and the supporting action plan they endorsed. In the process, the Burmese junta got the international endorsement it seeks, and the reshuffled SPDC leadership accordingly joined the activities with seeming enthusiasm. There appears to be genuine political momentum behind this regional effort which, whether it morphs into operational effectiveness against trafficking in persons or not, is a reality that will have to be considered in planning anti-trafficking assistance programs in this region. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Cabinet-level and other officials from the six governments that form the COMMIT met in Rangoon on October 27-29 (ref b) to sign a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) pledging mutual cooperation against trafficking in persons (TIPs). They also developed and approved--subject to review in capitals--a related action plan to support the precepts outlined in the MOU and to further previously approved bilateral agreements. The operational plan, which will require foreign assistance to implement, will be up for approval at the COMMIT's next Senior Officers Meeting, tentatively scheduled for late March 2005 in Hanoi.

[1](#)3. (U) Cambodia, Laos, and Burma sent Cabinet-level officials to sign the MOU (Minister of Social Affairs, Minister of Labor, and Minister of Home Affairs, respectively); Vietnam was represented by its Vice-Minister of Public Security; the Chinese Vice Chairman of the State Council's National Working Committee for Children and Women signed on behalf of the PRC; and the Permanent Secretary in Thailand's Ministry of Social Development and Human Security initialed the document on behalf of the RTG (note: Thai Minister Sora-at Klinpratoom was a last minute no-show because of "urgent duties" in Bangkok).

[1](#)4. (SBU) Several Rangoon and Bangkok-based United Nations officials also attended, as did representatives from the Australian and UK (DFID) aid programs; and INGOs (World Vision and Save the Children). PolEconoffs attended as observers. Bangkok-based staff in the United Nations Inter-Agency Project on Human Trafficking in the Greater Mekong Sub-Region (UNIAP) served as the conference secretariat and also played an active supporting role in

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preparing substantive documents, guiding the process, and holding it together through the after-shocks from the recent political shuffle in Rangoon (ref a).

New Burmese Prime Minister Opens Ministerial Conference

[1](#)5. (SBU) Giving his first public speech following his promotion on October 20, Prime Minister Lt. General Soe Win--resplendent in a crisply pressed army uniform--opened the ministerial portion of the conference on October 29 by advocating for regional cooperation. He took a subtle swipe at Thailand ("encouraging to see that ownership of the problem and responsibility are recognized as issues that need to be recognized by countries of destination"), but he also commended the RTG for its efforts to register illegal migrant workers. The Thai Permanent Secretary said in his statement prior to the MOU signing and later in a post-session press conference that the RTG had registered 1.2 million migrants in Bangkok--80 percent of whom were Burmese--during a 2003 campaign to formalize the presence of such workers.

Comprehensive Memorandum of Understanding (MOU)

[1](#)6. (SBU) As approved on October 29, the MOU lays out methods and areas of cooperation to combat all aspects of human trafficking. The approved document addresses trafficking from a comprehensive perspective, including areas of policy and cooperation at the national and international

levels; legal frameworks, law enforcement and criminal justice; protection, recovery and reintegration of victims; as well as preventive measures. Embassy sent full texts of the MOU and the Plan of Action to EAP/BCLTV and G/TIP on October 29 for further circulation as desired.

Action Plan Linked to MOU

17. (SBU) Meeting October 27-28 following an opening speech by the Burmese Minister of Home Affairs, some 30 senior officials from the participating governments divided the supporting activities into five general areas: policy and cooperation (e.g., mechanisms and systems for exchanging information, assessments of training needs); legal frameworks, law enforcement and justice (e.g., cooperation and investigation, as well as prosecution, of traffickers, including joint training and cross-border networking); protection, recovery, and reintegration (e.g., regional workshop on procedures for repatriation of victims, including development of common guidelines); preventive measures (e.g., collection and sharing of information on job, marriage and adoption brokers and agencies); and mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating implementation of the MOU (e.g., maintain existing COMMIT task forces in each country and work with UNIAP to develop a schedule for implementation of the Plan of Action).

Atmospherics: Chinese and Thai are Most Important Players

18. (C) In a private conversation with poloff after the meeting, UNIAP's program director, Phil Robertson (Amcit), said the Thai and Chinese have taken pivotal roles in bringing regional cooperation on TIPs to this point. Thai Prime Minister Thaksin, he said, aims to show that his government has not lost control of its borders and related social problems. The Chinese, on the other hand, want to be part of a recognized international forum dealing with the international aspects of their southern and western flanks. Robertson also credited Dr. Saisaree Chutikul, a Thai social activist involved with the Commission for the Rights of the Child, for playing an important role in bringing the October 27-29 conference to fruition and keeping related developments on track.

Comment: And the Burmese Government Also Benefits

19. (C) Prime Minister Soe Win stated in his October 29 address to the conference that regional cooperation on TIPs in this area is a "win-win" situation for all directly concerned (Note: most especially for the Burmese, since the COMMIT was launched in Rangoon. End note). The new GOB leaders got a hearty international endorsement without exposing themselves to embarrassing questions, pressure about their human rights policies, or their own record on TIPs.

110. (C) More importantly, however, there appears to be genuine momentum behind this regional effort. The logical end to the exercise that took place in Rangoon last week could put recipient countries in the driver's seat with foreign assistance programs on TIPs. If the process now set in motion plays out as the planners aim to have it develop, this could be beneficial, over the longer term, for both recipient and donor governments. However, further evolution of intra-regional cooperation on TIPs with Burmese participation--with the generals continuing their abhorrent policies on human rights--could be a significant obstacle to USG assistance and engagement on a region-wide basis on TIPs' issues. End comment.

Martinez